

Paramilitary Forces and Nigeria's Elections, 2015-2023

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Abstract

There are theoretical and political debates on what should be the role and the extent of deployment of paramilitary bodies and security forces in the electoral process. These theoretical and political debates are propelled and compelled by the fact that the issue of security during the implementation of the electoral process poses major problems to new and emerging democracies worldwide. Since the advent of democratic government in Nigeria's Fourth Republic, there have been various experiences and performances in the participation of paramilitary institutions in electoral process. However, extant literature has not adequately addressed the roles of paramilitary agencies in Nigeria's elections particularly those conducted in 2015, 2019 and 2023. Besides, existing studies have not detailed the impediments that marred the involvement of paramilitary forces in those elections. This is the major gap this study intends to fill. Within this context, this study has as its main goal a rigorous analysis of the role of paramilitary institutions in the electoral process in Nigeria, using the 2015, 2019 and 2023 general elections as a case study. The data used for this study were collected through primary and secondary sources. While primary data was gathered from officers of paramilitary agencies who participated in the 2015, 2019 and 2023 general elections through oral interviews, the secondary sources were obtained from the review of related literature. The major findings of the research are: that the 2015, 2019 and 2023 general elections were to a large extent successful largely as a result of the efforts of paramilitary security agencies who worked in collaboration with sister security bodies to provide adequate security. The research recommends that the areas that recorded significant improvement should be maintained. At the same time, challenges experienced by paramilitary agencies during the 2015, 2019 and 2023 general elections should be looked into in future elections.

Keywords: Paramilitary bodies, security, electoral process, emerging democracies

Introduction

Extant literature is replete with studies that have been conducted to examine key aspects of election security in Nigeria's political history since independence. Some of these studies (Adebayo, 2011; Eya, 2003; Ibeogu and Nkwede, 2015; Iyayi, 2005; Jega, 2011) have focused on election security issues revolving around electoral violence, problems and roles of critical stakeholders. Other researches (Adesote and Abimbola, 2014; Alemika, 2007; Kushie, 2011; Animashaun, 2010) on election security in Nigeria have interrogated the specific roles of the military and the police in the entire processes. In addition, various studies by scholars (Skocpol & Morris, 1999; Dalton 1998, 2006; Norris 1999, 2010) have expressed concern over the seeming decline in the levels of citizens' engagement in electoral activities as well as the low level of confidence placed on security institutions.

Globally and in continental Africa, violence and insecurity have become recurring decimal associated with the electoral process in democratic practices. Since Independence in 1960, Nigeria has had experiences and incidences of election security challenges stemming from security institutions' roles and inadequacies. Like the previous elections in the country, there were concerns about the outcome and aftermath of the 2015, 2019 and 2023 general elections. This concern ranges from free, fair, and credible conduct of the polls. The outcome and aftermath of the elections have become a matter of concern, not only domestically, but also on the international stage. It is important to emphasize that security is dispensable to the conduct of free, fair and credible elections. From providing basic security to voters at political party rallies and campaigns to ensuring that result forms are protected, the whole electoral process is circumscribed by security considerations (Jega, 2013). However, Nigeria's elections have been faced with a plethora of security challenges and in most cases, the primary goal of elections has been unmet (Ojukwu, Mazi-Mbah and Maduekwe, 2019).

One of the bases for the conduct of free, fair, and credible elections in any polity is the provision of adequate security before, during and after elections. Of course, security forms a central part of a democratic government. To Pascal (2017), security is freedom from danger or relative freedom from aggression and unwarranted violation. Security is a core demand of the citizen (Onwuama, 2018). This has to do with the protection of the lives and properties of individuals by the state against both internal and external aggression (Onwuama, 2018).

Given the character of the Nigerian state, electoral violence, resulting from representational, campaign, balloting, and result conflicts, has been a terminal of Nigerian politics since the 1950s (Albert, 2007). One of the complex and fundamental chains in the success and credibility of the electoral process is election security (Ojo, 2019). It is critical to the success of the electoral process and no electoral management body can conduct successful elections if the security environment is charged, polluted or violent (Ali, 2015).

A review of literature shows a major gap that is yet to be filled on election security in Nigeria. The roles of paramilitary institutions in Nigeria's elections, particularly in the 2015, 2019, and 2023 general elections have not been adequately interrogated by existing studies. This is the major gap this study intends to fill. Though the 2015, 2019, and 2023 general elections were given a pass mark both by local and international observers, it is however important to assess the performance of the security agencies in the conduct of that election. The paper is thus, aimed at examining the role and challenges of paramilitary forces in the 2015, 2019, and 2023 elections, to improve on them for future elections.

This paper is organized or structured into five segments. The first section provides the general introduction of this research, detailing the statement of the problem by reviewing existing relevant literature on the subject matter, research objective and context. The second section provides an overview of Election Security Challenges in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. The third segment discusses the constitutional roles of paramilitary institutions focusing on the Nigeria Customs Service (NCS), Nigeria Immigration Service (NIS), Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), Nigeria Prisons Services (NPS), and Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC). The fourth segment scrutinizes the roles of paramilitary forces in the 2015, 2019, and 2023 general elections. The fifth section interrogates the various challenges of paramilitary forces in the 2015, 2019 and 2023 general elections. The sixth segment provides the summary, conclusion and recommendations for future elections.

Overview of Election Security Challenges in Nigeria's Fourth Republic

Since 1999 when the Fourth Republic began, election security challenges have become a recurring decimal. To be sure, electoral campaigns and elections in Nigeria have been characterized by both psychological and physical violence (Alemika, 2007). Nigeria's electoral violence has been placed within the door step of vote rigging, doggy politics, ballot snatching at gun points, violence, acrimony, "thuggery", brazen falsification of election results, the use of security agencies against political opponents and the intimidation of voters over the years (Olaniyan and Amao, 2015, Omotola, 2009). The acts of electoral violence also include murder, arson, rioting, abduction and psychological intimidation.

Alemika (2007) observed that before the 2003 general elections held on April 12, April 19 and May 2003 several party members including top-ranking officials and electoral candidates were either killed or targeted for assassination. During the elections, numerous cases of violence were recorded in different parts of the country. The implication was that the quality of popular participation and the integrity of the results of the elections were undermined by the reported widespread violence deployed to intimidate voters, snatch and stuff or destroy ballot boxes, and intimidate officials to manipulate and falsify results (Alemika, 2007: 152).

Ahead of the 2007 elections, former President Olusegun Obasanjo declared: "This election is a do-or-die affair for me and the PDP. This election is a matter of life and death for the PDP and Nigeria", setting the tone for an acrimonious election that was widely acknowledged as lacking in credibility (Tenuche, 2009). It was therefore not surprising that the 2007 elections posed serious security challenges, not only in terms of the security of the men and materials deployed for elections, but also in terms of protecting the voters and the candidates. In terms of fraud and loss of credibility, as well as violence, the 2007 general election is in a class of its own. The election was generally regarded as fraudulent and marred with violence in various parts of the country where police stations, INEC offices and government buildings were burnt in protests (Olaniyan and Amao, 2015). In the run-up to the 2007 general elections, it was widely reported that there was an attempt to bomb the headquarters of INEC using a petrol laden with fuel (Jega, 2012).

In addition, the aftermath effect of the 18 April 2011 Presidential election was marred by violence. Gory images of dead bodies, burnt vehicles and charred property would sadly linger for long in the memories of some as the defining image of that election. Even in a country seemingly accustomed to electoral violence, it has to be admitted that 2011 was unprecedented in scale, scope and severity. Violence broke out almost simultaneously in some or most parts of the following states of Kano, Kaduna, Adamawa, Katsina, Plateau, Yobe, Bauchi, Borno and Sokoto leading to the imposition of state-wide 24-hours curfew in some of the states. According to Human Rights Watch, within three days over 800 persons lost their lives to the election violence and about 65,000 were displaced

(Anyanya, 2013:25). More worrisome was the killing of innocent nine young youth corps who were working for INEC as ad hoc staff.

Table 1: Dimensions of Electoral Insecurity in Nigeria

	Pre-election period	Election period	Post-election period
1	Physical attacks on INEC staff and facilities	Physical attacks on INEC staff and facilities	Physical attacks on INEC staff and facilities
2	Intimidation of opponents by political thugs	Intimidation of voters	Intimidation of opponents by political thugs
3	Physical attacks on political opponents	Attacks on security personnel on election duties	Physical attacks on political opponents
4	Arson targeting INEC facilities	Misuse of security orderlies	Arson targeting INEC facilities
5	Kidnapping of political opponents	Physical attacks on political opponents	Kidnapping of political opponents
6	Possession of illegal weapons and substances like drugs	Possession of illegal weapons and substances like drugs	Possession of illegal weapons and substances like drugs
7	Violence at party meetings and conventions	Violence at party campaigns	Violence at party meetings and conventions
8	Assassination of political opponents	Assassination of political opponents	Assassination of political opponents
9	Intimidation of members of the public by political thugs	Snatching and/or destruction of election materials	Intimidation of members of the public by political thugs
10	Physical attacks on potential voters	Kidnapping of INEC staff	Physical attacks on potential voters
11	Attacks on security personnel on election duties	Kidnapping of political opponents	Attacks on security personnel on election duties
12	Snatching and/or destruction of voter registration materials	Violence at polling and collation centres	Snatching and/or destruction of election materials
13	Cyber attack on INEC database	Falsification of results and destruction of result sheets	Destruction of election litigation evidence

Source: Jega, A.M. (2012). "The Electoral Process and Security Sector Synergy". A Paper Delivered to EIMC 6 Participants of Institute of Security Studies (ISS), Abuja, August, 21

Constitutional Role of Paramilitary Forces in Nigeria

By paramilitary forces in this paper, emphasis is placed on the Nigeria Customs Service (NCS), Nigeria Immigration Service (NIS), Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), Nigeria Prisons Services (NPS), and Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC). Before assessing their role in the 2015, 2019, and 2023 elections, it is imperative to analyze their constitutional role within the context of Nigeria's national security.

Nigeria Customs Service

The Nigeria Customs Service is a paramilitary organization stationed in Nigeria ports (both sea and air) and land borders and often deployed to Nigeria highways. The role of the Nigeria Customs Service in enhancing national security cannot be overemphasized. Their primary responsibility is to collect customs and excise duties without compromising the security of the Nigerian nation. The NCS is the agency with major responsibility for controlling all cargo and goods entering, exiting or transiting through national territory. In this regard, the Nigerian Customs Service has a role in protecting Nigerian society and also securing international trade (Imobighe, 2003). With the obligation of monitoring the international business chain either through the sea ports, air ports or land borders the illegal movement of arms ammunitions weapons and all military hardware is checkmated.

Nigeria Immigration Service

The Immigration Service performs fairly specialized roles which are in some respects related to that of the customs. The service enforces the country's Immigration laws and prevents the influx of illegal aliens into the country. Immigration is also responsible for combating smuggling with the assistance of other security agencies. Like the customs, the Immigration posts are to be found in all the country's ports as well as the main entry points along the country's land borders.

Nigeria Prisons Service

The Prisons Service derives its powers from Cap 366 Laws of the Federation of Nigeria 1990. This authority established the Nigeria Prisons Service and saddled it with the responsibility of keeping in safe custody persons legally interned. The Nigeria Prisons Service as the third tier of the criminal justice system has the mandate, though not limited to the custodial role, but the development of human resource capital (Haladu, 2009: 69). This function of keeping away the high-risk criminals legally satisfied is an aspect of security that protects to the high and low in the society. Thus prisons are one of those agencies/institutions of coercion that facilitates the execution of social-contract between the state and the citizens (Haladu, 2009). Put simply, Ogunipe (2010:371-372) explained the role of the Prisons Service from five perspectives:

- i. Take into custody all those legally interned,
- ii. Producing them before the courts as and when due if they are on remand,
- iii. Identifying the causes of their anti-social conduct,
- iv. Set in motion mechanisms for their retraining and reformation preparatory to returning them to the society as normal law-abiding citizens; and
- v. Generating revenue for the state through the use of Prison farms and industries.

Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps

The Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) is also a paramilitary force established by Act No. 2 of 2003 and amended by Act 6 of 2007. This 2007 amended NSCDC Act empowers the corps to maintain twenty-four hours surveillance over infrastructures, sites and projects for the Federal, State and Local Governments. The Act also empowers the corps to assist in the maintenance of peace and order and the protection, and rescuing of the civil population during the period of emergency. NSCDC had also been assigned to play crucial roles in grassroots security systems and nation-building. It has the power to arrest with a warrant or without a warrant, detain, investigate and institute legal proceedings against any person who is reasonably suspected of having committed an offense, investigate and take the necessary steps to forestall any planned act of terrorism and report same to appropriate federal security agency among others (Abolurin, 2011:3).

Federal Road Safety Corps

In February 1988, the Federal Government created the Federal Road Safety Commission through Decree No. 45 of 1988 as amended by Decree 35 of 1992 referred to in the statute books as the FRSC Act Cap 141 Laws of the Federation of Nigeria (LFN) passed by the National Assembly as the Federal Road Safety Commission Establishment Act 2007. The functions of the commission generally relate to making the highway safe for motorists and other road users. Recommending works and devices designed to eliminate or minimize accidents on the highways and advising the Federal and State Governments including the Federal Capital Territory Administration and relevant governmental agencies on the localities where such works and devices are required, and educating motorists and members of the public on the importance of discipline on the highway. In particular the commission is charged with the responsibilities of preventing or minimizing accidents on the highway; clearing obstructions on any part of the highways; and educating drivers, motorists and other members of the public generally (<http://frsc.gov.ng>).

The Paramilitary Forces in the 2015, 2019 and 2023 Elections

The involvement of security forces is not only necessary for the proper management of elections, but also to secure the election environment. Given the Nigerian environment, free, fair and acceptable elections are possible if security personnel are massively deployed. While security personnel like the Police, State Security Service, Nigeria Intelligence Service and the Armed Forces are saddled with the management of election security, the role of paramilitary agencies or forces cannot be underestimated in the 2015, 2019 and 2023 general elections. Thus, a synergy between the Independent National Electoral Commission, the regular forces, and paramilitary forces will ensure a peaceful election. As Jega succinctly put it:

While it is true that various security agencies have different legal roles, professional inclinations and organizational tendencies, effective security of elections requires that agency idiosyncrasies must recede in favour of interagency synergy (Jega, 2012:6).

This is where the role of paramilitary forces comes in within the context of the 2015, 2019 and 2023 general elections. As earlier indicated, paramilitary forces in this paper are limited to the Nigeria Immigration Service, Nigeria Custom Service, Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps, Nigerian Prisons Service and Federal Road Safety Corps.

Nigeria Immigration Service

Ahead of the 2015, 2019, and 2023 general elections, the Comptroller General of Immigration Service, David Shikfu Parradang convened a meeting with some embassy officials and leaders of ECOWAS community residents

in Nigeria particularly our neighbours such as the Republic of Cameroun and Chad at the Service Headquarters Abuja. The Comptroller General told the officials and community leaders to advise their nationals to steer clear from the 2015, 2019, and 2023 elections; warning that any non-Nigerian caught interfering in the electoral process would be made to face the law. The Comptroller General stated that the warning has become necessary to ensure that the existing robust relationship among member states in the sub-region was not undermined by unnecessary meddlesomeness in the internal electoral affairs of member states.

Consequently, the Comptroller General announced the closure of all land and sea borders across the country to allow for a hitch-free 2015, 2019, and 2023 elections. In this sense, he enjoined the community leaders to advise any of their nationals who have Nigeria's Permanent Voter's Card, National Identity Card or Passport to surrender immediately as anyone caught with any of them shall be prosecuted.

It is important to note that meetings were held with representatives of envoys and community leaders from Niger Republic, Senegal, Chad, Cameroun, Guinea and Mali interactively. The meeting was one of the several efforts by the NIS to sensitize, non-Nigerians on their roles before, during and after the 2015, 2019, and 2023 general elections. In the same vein, the Comptroller General had earlier held briefings with state Commands Comptrollers where he directed enhanced mop-up operation on all irregular migrants in the country. Since the directives, a total of 2066 irregular migrants rounded up across the country have been removed (PM News, 2015).

Based on the understanding of the tremendous role of the Immigration Service in the 2019 general elections, the Immigration Service (NIS) received a total sum of N2.6 billion for election security operations from the Federal Government. As part of its efforts, the NIS put in place mechanisms that aimed at ensuring that only genuine observers were allowed access to election venues. On this, the Comptroller General of the Nigeria Immigration Service Muhammad Babandede posited thus:

If you are a monitor participating in election, you should declare it right from the beginning. We don't want people to do clandestine operations in the name of election. We don't want anybody who will come and create tension and crisis in our community. So any non-Nigerian coming in, we must know the purpose of your visit [to Nigeria]...if you get a visa to come to Nigeria to do business, to do tourism, or to participate in something else other than monitoring election and we find you monitoring election, we will charge you and deport you because that is not what you asked for. (Odeyemi, 2019)

The readiness of the NIS to safeguard the nation's borders during the 2015 general elections was to caution against insecurity in the land and to avoid rigging and violence after the election considering the volatile nature of the 2015, 2019, and 2023 elections. However, the Nigerian government was not against foreigners, but against those foreigners who enter the country without valid papers.

Table 2: Summary of Illegal Immigrants Deported in Some States Ahead of the 2015 General Elections

S/No	State	No. of Illegal Immigrants Deported
1	Kaduna	106
2	Edo	36
3	Jigawa	430
4	Cross River	40
5	Akwa Ibom	460

Source: Compiled by the authors from Different Newspapers and Magazines.

Table 3: Summary of Illegal Immigrants Deported in Some States Ahead of the 2019 General Elections

S/No	State	No. of Illegal Immigrants Deported
1	Kano	311
2	Benue	109
3	Bornu	208
4	Rivers	102
5	Ogun	98

Source: Compiled by the authors from Different Newspapers and Magazines.

Table 4: Summary of Illegal Immigrants Deported in Some States Ahead of the 2023 General Elections

S/No	State	No. of Illegal Immigrants Deported
1	Akwa Ibom	303
2	Gombe	109
3	Ogun	33
4	Kaduna	516
5	Oyo	18

Source: Compiled by the authors from Different Newspapers and Magazines.

Specifically, some of the deportees alleged that they were given fake papers to enter the country, while those who showed genuine documents were allowed to go but were warned against obtaining the Permanent Voters Card (PVC) or used as political thugs. To be sure, the NIS seized temporary and permanent Nigerian voter's cards from nationals of Niger Republic who entered Nigeria illegally. The NIS also claimed that 57 temporary voters' cards and 367 old national identity cards were received by Immigration authorities in Sokoto, Jigawa and Zamfara States (Newswatch Times, 2015). The whole exercise by NIS was to prevent foreigners from participating in the 2015 general elections as well as providing adequate security within the context of Nigeria's National Security.

Nigeria Customs Service

The Nigeria Customs Service also complemented the existing role of the Immigration Service in the management of election security in the 2015, 2019, and 2023 general elections. In the 2023 general elections alone, 3,138 Custom officers were posted for election duty across the country. The officers complimented the efforts of other security bodies in providing security during the 2023 general elections. The table below shows the statistical data on the number of custom officers posted for election duties in the 2023 general elections in some states and the FCT.

Table 5: Deployment of Custom officers for election duties in the 2023 General Elections

S/No	State	No. of Custom officers Deployed
1	Kano	242
2	Kaduna	174
3	Bauchi	146
4	Katsina	143
5	FCT (Abuja)	178

Source: Compiled by the authors from Different Newspapers and Magazines.

In preparation for the 2015, 2019, and 2023 general elections, the NCS beefed up security along the Idi-Iroko border as well as other approved and unapproved routes to curtail smuggling of illegal arms and ammunition into the country. For instance, Ogun State Comptroller Area Command (Comptroller Mamudu Haruna) said the Command in collaboration with other security agencies will try to ensure that the 2015 elections were not marred by smuggled arms (Ships and Ports News, 2014). Thus, the influx of non-Nigerians and illegal immigrants mixing up with the teeming unemployed youths in Nigeria were curtailed by combined efforts of both the Nigerian Immigration Service and Nigeria Customs Service in disrupting the success of the 2015, 2019, and 2023 general elections.

It is imperative to emphasize here that the Customs and Immigration performed fairly specialized roles in the 2015, 2019, and 2023 general elections, which are in some respects related. The customs helped to enforce custom laws and prevent illegal movement of goods across the country's borders prior to the election period and during the election days. The immigrations on the other hand helped to enforce the country's Immigration laws and prevent the influx of illegal aliens into the country in the wake of the 2015, 2019, and 2023 general elections (see table 2 and 3). As part of its efforts in the 2019 general elections, the Nigeria Customs Service (NCS) organized intensive patrols to check and man the borders as well as various checkpoints in the country (Nnamdi, 2019). Approved routes were also be floated as usual as regard the Federal Government directives for floating of boarders (Nnamdi, 2019).

Furthermore, on the eve of the 2019 general elections, Nigeria customs intercepted a truck loaded with military wears, arms and ammunition (INEC Report, 2019). The body claimed that the incepted weapons were tools that some political hoodlums were planning to use to disrupt the 2019 general elections and that their nefarious activities would never find their way into the country. The body ensured that roadblocks were put in place for

officers and men to carry out routine checks during the 2019 general elections. On this, the Comptroller General said that:

We will make sure that weapons or any tools used by hoodlums for their nefarious activities will never find their way in...We are members of security committee of the forthcoming general elections and as a member we have a role to play to ensure hitch free polls (Bankole, 2019).

Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps

The Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps recorded a significant achievement during the 2015, 2019, and 2023 general elections. The NSCDC deployed its officers for effective monitoring before, during and after the elections. The deployment of men and officers of the corps according to the then Commandant General was to identify black spots with the collaborative efforts of all security apparatus, in order to ensure a hitch-free polls (News Agency of Nigeria, 2015). The deployment of NSCDC was to ensure effective protection of residents and government installations against attack during the polls.

Just like other paramilitary agencies, National Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) received N3.6 billion for election security operations from the Federal Government for the 2019 general elections. Thus, Civil Defence complimented the efforts of the *Nigerian Police Force* and other sister *security* Agencies to provide security in 2019 general elections. Addressing the team leaders at the Corps National Headquarters, Abuja, on the modus operandi of the assignment before their dispatch for the 2019 general elections, the CG reiterated that the Corps is a major stakeholder in the security architecture of the country, as such, have been empowered to ensure a hitch free and yet credible elections in all states. He stated as thus:

Your deployment to the two states is not for you to engage in partisan politics, nor to compromise the integrity of this noble organization by accepting any form of gratification from any politicians; your job is to maintain peace and provide adequate security coverage for both sensitive and non-sensitive election materials, INEC staffs and the electorates (David, 2019)

Similarly, the NSCDC deployed 60,000 of its personnel throughout the country to ensure the security of Nigerians and government installations before, during and after the 2015 general elections. In the same vein, the NSCDC deployed dogs which was used to detect Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs). The organization also put in place the use of forensic psychologists and the deployment of modern surveillance vehicles to ensure a peaceful atmosphere for the conduct of the 2015 general elections

Nigeria Prisons Service

Imobighe (2003) argued that any national security study that emphasizes the need to support the country's coercive efforts with non-coercive measures to achieve optimum security, cannot but stress the importance of the Prison Service. Thus, the Prison Service is the main penal institution where criminals are expected to be moulded into normal societal life. This is why there was a synergy between the prison service and other security agencies in the conduct of the 2015, 2019 and 2023 general Elections. The Prison Service is an agency that provides another opportunity for those who fall foul of the law to get their acts together again. In this regard, the Prison Service takes lawful custody of all those certified by the court (in committing electoral crimes) to be kept and produce them in the law court. Therefore, the role of Prison service in the conduct of the 2015, 2019, and 2023 general elections cannot be underestimated within the context of Nigeria's national security.

Federal Road Safety Corps

In line with its statutory responsibility to ensure sanity on the nation's highways during the 2015, 2019 and 2023 general elections, the Federal Road Safety Corps having envisaged high volume of traffic nationwide before the elections; drew a road map towards crash-free electoral process. The arrangement also involved the deployment of personnel and logistics across its 331 formations to ensure optimal coverage of designated critical corridors of highways. In the course of these internal initiatives, the corps was co-opted into the National Security Advisory Committee with other Para-Military agencies to undertake specific roles throughout the general elections such as routine patrols, rescue service and other traffic-related functions.

The FRSC deployed 20,000 personnel and 413 patrol vehicles, ambulances and tow trucks along designated routes of the highways in its efforts to collaborate with other security agencies to ensure sanity on the nation's highways throughout the elections. Since the elections were in 2 phases on 28th March 2015 for the Presidential and National Assembly and 11 April 2015 for Gubernatorial and State Assembly elections, the Corps also drew a road map towards effective patrolling of designated routes of the highways, in addition to prompt rescue services and public enlightenment campaigns, as part of measures to engender best road safety practices among road users. This is in addition to the corps' 24 emergency ambulance response centres located at designated routes across the country in the FCT, Kaduna, Gombe, Jigawa, Taraba, Niger, Kogi, Ondo, Edo, Osun, Nasarawa, Plateau, and Kwara States.

In collaboration with other security agencies the FRSC ensured effective security around elections, which was critical to the conduct of free, fair and credible 2015, 2019 and 2023 general elections.

Challenges of Paramilitary Forces in the 2015, 2019 and 2023 General Elections

The general view of paramilitary forces' involvement in the conduct of the 2015, 2019, and 2023 general elections was positive. Notwithstanding there were many challenges that hindered effective security measures throughout the election period. In the first instance, the paramilitary forces were dissatisfied with the prevailing mode of deployment. There was no clarity as to which security outfit is to provide what. This lack of clarity more often than not contributed to inter-agency rivalry among the paramilitary forces. Lack of cooperation among security agencies is one of the problems of the NSCDC. Specifically, the relationship between the NSCDC and the Police is cosmetic, other agencies may be indifferent, but such an attitude can sabotage the efforts of collective principle within the context of managing electoral security.

In addition, too much physical presence of paramilitary forces poses a big challenge. This is because most of the paramilitary personnel were not properly briefed on their task; which led to sheer indiscipline by the officers.

Closely linked to the above is inadequate equipment and facilities. Without security gadgets, vehicles, and arms, the operatives of the paramilitary forces during the 2015 and 2019 general elections; were highly incapacitated to function and discharge their duties creditably. There were also challenges of infrastructure, especially transportation and communication.

Similarly, the focus of the prison service operation appears to be neglected. Although, there was inter-agency cooperation between the prison service and other paramilitary forces in the conduct of the 2015, 2019, and 2023 general elections, what is worrisome is whether those arrested for electoral crimes by other paramilitary forces were handed over to the prison service for prosecution. Only convicts can be subjected to the treatment regimes of the Prisons. By law, an accused person stands innocent until convicted. This means that only convicted prisoners shall be accessed to pass through the transformation that takes place in prison. Here then lies the challenge of running a prison in Nigeria (Ogundipe, 2010). This further undermined Prison Service responsibilities within the context of Nigeria's security; especially in the area of electoral security management.

Furthermore, the Nigeria's Immigration faces big challenges in the war against illegal immigrants in the country in preparation for the 2015, 2019, and 2023 general elections. Nigeria has porous borders, with about 84 regular borders and over 1,400 illegal routes into the country (Newswatch Times, 2015). However, policing this huge number of entry points when the NIS has only 22,000 officers is a herculean task. Even more challenging is the corrupt attitude of members of the paramilitary forces in releasing offenders after collecting money from them. This further affected the credibility of the 2015, 2019 and 2023 general elections.

In addition, delay in the payment of election allowances was a major challenge for paramilitary officers on election duties. For instance, after the 2023 general elections, officers of the Nigerian custom services who were posted on election duty lamented the non-payment of their election allowance months after the conclusion of the process. A deputy superintendent of Customs deployed to Kano State also expressed dissatisfaction with the delay in payment of their election allowances when he said

We still do not know what happened to our election allowances. It is almost two months now but we have not received any amount, and I can confidently tell you I have not heard of any custom officer that has received the allowance (*Daily Trust Newspaper*, 3rd May, 2023).

To further establish the fact that there was delay in the payment of election allowances of some paramilitary officers drafted for the 2023 general election, a KII session with an officer of the Nigeria Security and Civil Defense Corps who was on election duty generally submitted that:

Our election allowances were not processed on time. We suffered while on election duty spending our money for transportation to and fro our bits or areas of coverage. Yet, our remunerations were delayed. This was a major challenge as far as I am concerned (KII with Mr. Gafar Dipo, June 2024).

Unethical practices by some police officers during those elections also created some difficulties for paramilitary officers to carry out their roles effectively. While the police was the primary security agency saddled with the mandate of election security, the paramilitary forces only provided supportive roles in those elections. In some cases, there were allegations that police officers on election duty connived with desperate politicians who were hell-bent on manipulating the process. Where the paramilitary officers working with such policemen objected to these unethical conduct or act of compromise, they were resisted, thereby impeding their ability to discharge roles expected of them. This was a major challenge that paramilitary forces experienced in the discharge of their election duties. To further establish this fact, a KII session with a senior officer in Nigeria Custom Service who participated in the 2023 general election is worth quoting in *extenso*:

Some of my colleagues complained from their own experience...the encounter they had with some of the security agents especially the police conniving with the politicians and when they (my colleagues) tried to stop them, you know in order not to cause crisis, what they did was to avoid such police officers and allowed them to do whatever they wanted to do. Our people complained a lot about such discrepancies in value (KII with Mr. Stephen Kandudi, June 2024)

The paramilitary forces deployed for election roles also faced a big challenge which bordered around the question of lack of full weight of coercive apparatus in the discharge of their duties. Put differently, in line with international best practices, paramilitary officers were not expected to be armed while on election duty in polling boots. This posed a major challenge to paramilitary officers on election duties in the 2015, 2019, and 2023 general elections. The primary data extracted from the key informant interview (KII) conducted with a retired comptroller of Immigration Service (CIS) lends credence to this. It reads:

Our officers on election duties faced the problem emanating from lack of full weight of coercive apparatus in the discharge of their duties. In some cases, they had difficulties enforcing law and order while on election duty because they were not armed. However, people still respected them because of their uniform. Secondly, officers deployed for those elections had transportation issues, that is getting to their places of assignment for election security. Some were posted to riverine and remote areas without any arrangement on how they would get there in terms transportation. This was a challenge as well (KII with Mr. Adeyi Musa, June 2024)

Conclusion: Lessons for the 2027 General Elections

The 2015, 2019, and 2023 general elections have come and gone. The involvement of paramilitary forces in the conduct of those elections was commendable. Although, there are a few challenges encountered, the following measures should be adopted for successive conduct of the 2027 general elections with the possible involvement of paramilitary forces:

1. The paramilitary forces need adequate planning before getting involved in elections.
2. The capacity and resources of the paramilitary forces for intelligence gathering and electoral crime investigation should be substantially enhanced.
3. Paramilitary forces to be deployed for the 2027 general elections should be properly trained and provided with adequate incentives; so as not to compromise the integrity of the election.
4. There must be an effective collaboration among the paramilitary forces, with a clear area of responsibilities and jurisdiction.
5. Paramilitary forces should pay serious attention to states or areas adjudged to be flashpoints.
6. Paramilitary forces should be neutral and non-partisan in any election. However, those officers involved in a partisan manner should be sanctioned.
7. The inter-agency synergy should be strengthened to achieve effective and efficient electoral security management.

8. Paramilitary forces should exhibit a high level of professionalism, competence and discipline. They should also cooperate with the general public before, during, and after the election.

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- Key Informant Interviews (Primary Data):**
- Oral Interview with Mr. Adeyi Musa, June (64yrs), a retired comptroller of Immigration Service (CIS) at his Residence in Ibadan, 3rd June, 2024.
- Oral Interview with Mr. Gafar Dipo (56yrs), an officer of the Nigeria Security and Civil Defense Corps at his Residence in Ibadan, 2nd June, 2024.
- Oral Interview with Mr. Stephen Kandudi (49yrs), officer in Nigeria Custom Service at his Residence in Ibadan, 3rd June, 2024.